



## CONNECTICUT LEGAL SERVICES

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### Energy and Technology Committee Hearing

March 18, 2010

Testimony of Shirley Bergert<sup>1</sup>

Regarding SB 465, AN ACT CONCERNING PURCHASING OF PROPANE

#### Recommended Action: Support

There is very little regulation of propane dealers in Connecticut. The result is that consumers suffer unnecessary abuses. Unlike oil where tanks are owned by the property owner, propane dealers own most of the tanks located at residential dwellings. The two main problems that have been brought to our attention by consumers include:

- Dealers impose charges on those who rent their tanks with no contract, and with no advance warning. In my experience this has included rental fees and/or increases in such fees and hazmat fees imposed on each delivery. To the extent a dealer separates these fees from the charges for the propane delivered, the propane cost may appear to be lower than the real cost to the purchaser. This makes it hard to compare dealer charges for propane.
- Dealers prohibit deliveries by other dealers. Absent a contract for a fixed delivery price -- and few consumers have such contracts -- this allows dealers to deliver when they can charge top dollar for propane and not necessarily when the consumer needs a delivery.

The second problem is addressed by the bill. It would allow a homeowner or renter to purchase fuel for a rented tank from a propane dealer who does not own the tank. This would ensure badly needed competition in the propane business. It would provide much needed additional protection to the unwary consumer if dealers were also restricted from charging undisclosed fees separate from the cost of the delivered propane.

<sup>1</sup> Shirley Bergert serves: on the Low Income Energy Advisory Board (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 16a-41b); as the residential representative on the Energy Conservation Management Board overseeing the expenditure of ratepayer conservation funds in Connecticut Energy Efficiency Fund (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 16-245m); as the low income representative on the Fuel Oil Conservation Board (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 16a-22f); and on the Advisory Board of the Institute for Sustainable Energy at Eastern Connecticut State University.